



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Doctrinal Catechesis Session  
Mary Birmingham

## SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE



Igor Stoyanov's Icon of the Wedding Feast at Cana in Galilee

Public domain





## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer which is provided below.

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



### Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group.



### Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

#### Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in  
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

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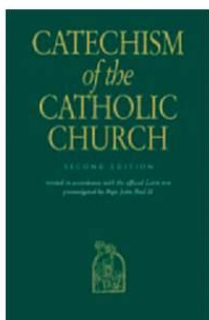


## Sharing Human Experience

Catechist leads participants in a brief small group exercise. Break into small groups (three or four). Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond.

- ▶ Think of the happiest, most well-adjusted married couple you know.
- ▶ What is it about their marriage that is worthy of your admiration?

Catechist uses their responses to launch into a discussion about sacrament of marriage.



## Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 1601-1654.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Marriage is a community of love in which a Christian man and woman commit to accept one another and give one another in a mutual, reciprocal, unbreakable bond (a covenant relationship) and thus form a life-long intimate union and partnership together.
- ▶ The language the Church used in the past in regard to marriage is *contract*. Today, however, the Church uses the word *covenant* to describe the marriage relationship. Covenant is a rich biblical concept. The Church speaks volumes to us about how it understands marriage just by the use of that one word.
- ▶ Covenant is rooted in the covenant God made with the people of Israel and the new covenant Jesus inaugurated by the shedding of his blood. God promised to care for human beings and in response human beings promised to love God with heart, mind, and soul and to be stewards of God's creation and to care for those who could not care for themselves (that is, they are to extend the same providential care to the poor and lowly that God extended to them).



- ▶ Christ ultimately entered into a covenant with his Church by his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. He in turn invites the new citizens of his kingdom to participate in the covenant he forged on Calvary.
- ▶ Those who take their marriage covenant seriously are willing to shed their blood for their spouse. They are willing to join the joys and sufferings of life to the cross of Christ thereby participating in Christ's ongoing redemption of the world. There is no nobler endeavor for married couples.
- ▶ For the married couple, the world is first and foremost the home they have created. A couple that takes their marriage covenant seriously works together for the salvation of their souls, their own, their spouse's, and then on to the world.
- ▶ Thus, our Church teaches that the covenant God forged first with the people of Israel and the new covenant Christ forged continues in the sacrament of marriage.

Catechist shares a story of from his or her life or invites a parishioner to come and share a similar story of how he or she has joined the joys and sufferings of life to the cross of Christ thereby finding deep meaning for their lives. See appendix #4 for an example.

Catechist then invites participants to respond to the following questions in the wider group.

- ▶ Considering the marriage you highlighted in your first discussion, describe elements of covenant that we just described and that you have witnessed in the relationship of the couple to which you referred earlier?

## Biblical Foundations of Marriage

### Old Testament

- ▶ In the Old Testament, the patriarchal system considered women to be property of the husband. Thus, one must delve deeper to find God's intention for marriage in the Old Testament texts. One way to uncover a theology of marriage is to consider the marriage metaphors and images that were used to describe God's relationship with the people of Israel.
- ▶ These images are resplendent with themes of love and tenderness, passion and intimacy. Let us listen.

Hark! My lover-here he comes  
springing across the mountains,  
leaping across the hills.

My lover is like a gazelle  
or a young stag.  
Here he stands behind our wall,  
gazing through the windows,  
peering through the lattices.

My lover speaks; he says to me,  
"Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!"  
(NAB, Song of Songs, 2:8-9)



- ▶ Such texts also reveal an understanding of marriage rooted in the covenant between God and human beings. In that text from the Song of Songs, God is the pursuer and we are his lover. One need look no further than the Song of Songs, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16; 23; Malachi 2:14-16 to discover the concept of marriage as covenant and intimate union with spouse and God.
- ▶ There was no specific marriage ritual in ancient Israel, but great importance was given to the blessing the parents bestowed on the couple.

## New Testament

- ▶ The marriage ceremony at the time of Jesus began with betrothal or promise of marriage. This occurred before the bridegroom (usually 18 years of age) “took possession” of his bride (usually 12 years old). This betrothal was usually accompanied by a large, extended family banquet which spanned several days. At the end of the extended feast, the bride was escorted to her new home. Contractually speaking, the marriage was a legal arrangement between the fathers of the couple.
- ▶ A variety of grounds existed for the husband to publicly dismiss or divorce his wife. If he did divorce the wife, he was denied access to her dowry. Wives were treated as marginal members of society. The Torah did try to improve their status by freeing them to marry again so long as the husband provided a letter of divorce (Deut 24:1-4).
- ▶ Just as we can look to the metaphors of the Old Testament to uncover a covenant theology of marriage, so too can we look to Jesus for the same theology.
- ▶ Jesus was referred to as the new Bridegroom. His relationship to the Church was likened to the spousal relationship. Salvation was likened to a marriage feast. Marriage “in the Lord” was understood as a means of achieving salvation (1 Cor 7: 12-16).

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question with one other person (dyads)

- ▶ Have you ever experienced a marriage which could be likened to Jesus’ spousal relationship with Church?
- ▶ What was it about that marriage that one could say was truly a means for both parties to achieve salvation?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Jesus was explicit in his teaching of marriage and divorce (refer to Appendix #1 for an extended interpretation of Jesus teaching). Jesus insisted that God intends the life-long unity of partners. Separation, breach, divorce, therefore goes against the divine will of God. If that is so, there should be no legal provision for it.
- ▶ Jesus recognized that Moses allowed for it, but Moses’ concession was a result of human sin. There is evidence, however, in Matthew’s Gospel that exceptions were made, and some marriages were deemed unlawful (see Mt 5: 32). Exceptions have been made throughout history and continue to be made today. Nevertheless, Jesus presented the ideal, and the ideal is the norm.



- ▶ St. Paul also weighed in on matters concerning marriage and divorce. While holding Jesus' instruction concerning marriage in the highest esteem and honor, he nevertheless recognized exceptions to Jesus' teaching. (See appendix #2 for an example of Paul's exception.)

## Historical Foundations

- ▶ As the Church grew and developed, so did its response to marriage. In the early centuries, marriage consisted of a civil ceremony that served as a public announcement of marriage. The couple then celebrated religious rituals to inaugurate their common life together.
- ▶ Civil marriage in the fourth and fifth century was considered affirmed by God. Marriage was understood as an image of the union between Christ and his Church and was for the purpose of begetting children and fostering love of spouse and imitating the love of Christ.
- ▶ Marriage in ancient Rome included four elements.
  1. The desire to marry
  2. Consent that could be verified
  3. Taking the wife into the home of the husband
  4. Living together as husband and wife
- ▶ When Christians married, they retained these elements but added other elements of religious significance such as blessing of the couple, a rite of putting on the veil, a prayer of petition and a prayer of blessing. The bride's white veil symbolized the union of Jesus Christ with his bride, the Church.
- ▶ The Council of Florence in 1439 deferred to St. Thomas Aquinas when it named three positive effects of marriage:
  1. The begetting of children and their education to worship God
  2. Faithfulness of the partners toward one another
  3. The life-long, unbreakable bond of the couple mirrored after Christ's unbreakable bond with his Church
- ▶ The Church teaches that sacraments confer grace specific to each sacrament. The Council of Trent in 1547 listed an official number of *seven* sacraments which confer grace. Marriage officially became one of the seven sacraments, even though it was designated as such at the Council of Verona in 1184.
- ▶ Thus, marriage in the first thousand years of history consisted of a civil ceremony and independent religious rituals of blessing.
- ▶ In the second thousand years, the Church created a form of marriage that would qualify it as valid marriage and required that the marriage take place before the pastor or other designated priest.
- ▶ One amazingly liberating action taken by the Church was to require free consent of the partners. This effectively eliminated the practice of "bartering for" the spouse as if in a market-place transaction as was often the custom in clan and tribal cultures. Consent given under duress is considered invalid.



Catechist invites participants to summarize what they have heard and to offer any comments or reflections or questions they might have up to this point. Is there anything in the biblical foundations of marriage or in the brief overview of the history of marriage that captured their interest? Were any questions raised for them?

## Foundations Today

- The Second Vatican Council set out to renew and deepen the theology of marriage. The Council described marriage as a community of love, a sharing in life and love, a vocation (*Gaudium et Spes*, 47, 49).
- The Church insisted that God himself is the author of marriage. It is not a human institution. “The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature if man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator” (CCC, 1603).
- The Council returned to the concept of *covenant* (and all biblical meanings inherent in that word) to describe marriage.
- The sacrament provides a special strength or grace proper to the sacrament. Jesus Christ is the source of this grace. Jesus dwells in the couple and gives the grace and strength to carry the crosses of life, to follow Christ, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s faults and burdens, and to love with a tender, fruitful, intimate love (CCC, 1642). (For a marriage to be valid, each person must have the ability to enter into such a covenant of love in the first place.)
- Church fathers maintained the importance of marriage in begetting children but understood the nature of married love finding fulfillment in those children.
- The Council stressed the importance of marital love and described the sacrament in terms of the love between husband and wife.
- Church fathers described the love of husband and wife and the effects of that love. They insisted that marital love is expressed and perfected in the marital act (GS 49).
- The teaching of the Council insisted that marital relations performed in accordance with human dignity must be honored with great reverence.
- The Church retained the language of contract but elevated the concept of covenant. Contract is used in a legalistic sense. It is used in relation to the exchange of vows and the legal relationship that flows from those vows (married life). The free consent of both parties also falls under the contractual context of marriage. Thus, marriage is both a legal relationship (contract) as well as a religious relationship (covenant).
- Refer to Appendix #3 for a comparison of the word contract and covenant and the reason covenant is a better concept to describe marriage than is contract.





#### Rite of marriage

- ▶ Acknowledging that our rituals express our theology, we hear the language of covenant expressed in the Nuptial Blessing in the Rite of Marriage. In that prayer, we are reminded that God, in order to reveal his plan of love for the world, made the union between husband and wife a reflection of the covenant he forged with his people.
- ▶ The blessing also reminds us that Christian marriage is a sign of the marriage between Jesus and the Church (cf. Nuptial Blessing, Rite of Marriage).
- ▶ The sacrament of marriage is a liturgical act—that means it is a public act. As such, it is appropriate that it take place in the public liturgy of the Church. The following elements are included in the rite of marriage.

#### Question:

- ▶ The priest asks about each person's freedom of choice, about their faithfulness to each other, and their willingness to raise children.

#### Consent

- ▶ The priest invites the couple to declare their consent.
- ▶ The couple joins hands.
  - The joining of hands is a sign of the unbreakable bond of marriage and the commitment to be faithful to one another.
- ▶ The bridegroom takes the woman to be his wife, and the bride takes the man to be her husband.
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that it is in this consent that the spouses are bound together as one flesh. So important is this free consent that if it is in any way coerced, or not freely entered into, then the marriage is invalid (CCC, 1628).
- ▶ The priest receives their consent and declares that what God has joined together no one shall divide.



- ▶ The priest or deacon receives the consent of the spouses on behalf of the Church and gives the Church's blessing (1628).

#### Blessing of rings

- ▶ The priest blesses the rings that the bride and groom give to each other as a sign of their fidelity.

#### Exchange of rings

- ▶ The couple exchange rings and declare them a sign of their fidelity to one another.

#### Nuptial blessing

- ▶ The priest blesses the couple on behalf of the Church.

### Symbols of Marriage

- ▶ The primary symbols of marriage are the joining of hands and the conferral of rings. The love and permanence of the union is expressed in those symbols.

### Canon Law and Marriage

- ▶ Canon law is the official book of law for the Catholic Church that sets forth legislation on all matters pertaining to the Church.
- ▶ Canon law affirms that marriage is directed to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of offspring (1055).
- ▶ Canon law upholds the life-long bond as an essential characteristic of a valid marriage (1056).
- ▶ Canon law affirms marriage as a contract, a covenant, and a sacrament of the Church.
- ▶ Canon law asserts that marriage is a sign of the covenant God forged with humanity and Christ established with his Church.
- ▶ Canon law insists that the sacrament of marriage provides the spouses with a special strength and grace and a consecration so that they may effectively fulfill the dignity and obligations of the married state (1134).
- ▶ Canon law affirms that the regular form for marriage requires the legal act of requesting and requiring the free consent of the couple (1108 #2).

### Conditions for a Valid Marriage

- ▶ A marriage is valid only if each person is fully competent to enter into the marriage and both partners possess an absolute free will and desire to marry one another.
- ▶ A marriage is valid if consent is given before the bishop of the diocese or the pastor of the parish (or another priest, deacon, or designated lay person).
- ▶ A marriage is valid when two witnesses to the consent are present (1108 #1).
  - Witnesses are required because marriage is considered a state of life in the Church—just as priesthood is a state of life in the Church, thus there must be certainty that the marriage took place. Hence, two witnesses are required to testify to it. (CCC, 1631)



- A marriage is absolutely indissoluble (unbreakable) if in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The marriage is deemed valid by the Church, if the marriage is consummated and if both partners are baptized.

○

## Annulments

- ▶ The Church's teaching regarding marriage validity between baptized and non-baptized persons is complex and requires the ministry and assistance of the Church.
- ▶ In order for a person to be fully initiated in the Catholic Church, there must be no marriage impediments. In other words, if the person is in an irregular marriage, the impediments must be officially removed before the person is free to enter the Church.
- ▶ A person seeking entrance to the Church or access to the sacraments must be free to do so.
- ▶ A person is in an irregular marriage if that person or his or her spouse was married before, and subsequently divorced.
- ▶ If such is the case, an annulment of the first marriage is required before the person is free to have their present marriage blessed or enter the Church or have access to the sacraments.
- ▶ The annulment process has the potential to bring healing and closure to the wounds caused by divorce. The Church always seeks to err on the side of compassion and will do everything in its power to assist people in removing the impediments that would keep them from the sacraments of the Church. It is important that such persons meet with their pastor to discuss all of his or her options.



## Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to relate what was shared today to some experience in their lives. Catechist shares an experience from his or her life that illustrates the theology of marriage just expressed and then invites others to do the same. This sharing needs to be done in dyads as this has the potential to conjure painful memories for some, Remind people to share only what they feel safe sharing.

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world. Marriage calls us out beyond ourselves into the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation. For example: In light of all that was shared, what is taking place in the parish this week that invites participation of the participants? For example, "This week our parish is hosting a marriage enrichment workshop for married couples. Come and enrich your marriage, and pray for all those who gather."





## Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to respond in faith to the following challenge by writing their response in their journal.

- ▶ In what way does this teaching on marriage challenge you at this time in your life?
- ▶ In what way does today's session on marriage invite you to more deeply join your life to the paschal mystery of Christ, to join your joys and sorrows to the death and resurrection of Christ?
- ▶ What are you willing to commit to do in response to your reflection on the Scriptures and on the sacrament of marriage today?



## Closing Prayer

Catechist makes copies of **MARRIAGE III: A SIGN OF GOD'S LOVE** (Preface 74 in the Sacramentary) and all pray it together.

**Leader:** Let us end with the exquisitely beautiful prayer from the rite of marriage. It is the third Marriage Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer.

As we pray this prayer, let us stand, take one another's hand. If you are married, pray for your own marriage. If you are preparing for marriage, pray that you will bear in mind the covenant you are about to enter. If you are not married, pray for someone who is. Let us all pray for any couple we know who is struggling to stay together.

**Pray together:** MARRIAGE III: A SIGN OF GOD'S LOVE

### Sign of Peace

Before we take our leave, let us offer one another a sign of God's covenant love and abiding peace.



## Appendix

### #1. EXEGESIS OF Mark 10:2-16. The Pharisees ask Jesus a question about divorce.

- ▶ Jesus refused to be distracted by small-minded arguments about divorce. He moved the dialogue right to its center, to the heart of the matter. For Jesus, divorce and all that it involved was not the issue. God's intention for marriage was the issue.
- ▶ The Pharisees as always sought to trip Jesus with his own words. They deferred to Deuteronomy and thus Moses who allowed divorce. They were correct. Jesus did not argue with their assertion. Jesus simply moved them from the action of Moses to the reason for it in the first place. He insisted that Moses allowed divorce because of the arrogant, willful sinfulness of the people. The people refused to accept God's authority over their lives and God's intention for them at the creation of the world.
- ▶ Moses allowance of divorce was not the formulation of law, but rather a concession to the law. That concession was necessary because of the sinfulness of the people. Put simply, Moses concession to the law was a result of sin. Jesus understood divorce as a concession to human sin and weakness. God intended unity, equality, complementarity, wholeness, and union of body, soul, and spirit for the married couple. God intended a life-long unbreakable covenant of love.
- ▶ Jesus further clarified the issue when he was alone with his disciples. Remarriage after divorce is the same as adultery, for both husband and wife. Why? The first marriage was not broken. Jesus went further than the law by suggesting that the husband was to be held to the same standard as the wife. Jesus challenged the provision in the Torah in which only a woman could be guilty of adultery.
- ▶ Some scholars hint that Mark's Jesus was being pastorally sensitive to the situation of the Gentile Christians. Under Roman law, women were allowed to divorce their husbands. According to Jewish law, a man could not commit adultery against his wife; adultery was understood as sexual relations between a married woman and a man other than her husband. Therefore, a husband could not commit adultery against his wife, only against another married man. Jewish law forbade women to divorce their husbands.
- ▶ Jesus teaching clearly transcends the practice and cultural norms of his day. Jesus' intention for marriage was rooted in the equality, love, and complementarity God intended for husband and wife at the creation of the world. Two are to become one flesh. The marriage bond is a covenant like the covenant God forged with human beings. It cannot and must not be broken. To break the bond is to go against God's creation and intention for humanity. Marriage is rooted in the two great commandments. Jesus' teaching about divorce is affirmed throughout the New Testament (1 Cor. 7:-10; Mt. 19:3-9; 5:31-32; Lk 16:16.).



#2.

Christian married people were fearful that having sexual relations with an unbelieving spouse would make them unholy. Paul insisted that the Christian partner *sanctifies* (makes holy) the unbeliever and their children (1 Cor 7, 14). The Christian partner was not allowed to separate from the unbelieving spouse because of Jesus' prohibition against divorce. However, the unbelieving partner was free to separate, thus freeing the Christian partner to remarry (9vs. 12-16). This is the basis of one of the Church's forms of dissolving a marriage called the Pauline privilege. Paul himself held Jesus' instruction in high esteem, but nevertheless realized the need to make exceptions.

#3.

When we contrast the word *contract* with the word *covenant*, we are given a glimpse of what covenant implies. Contracts deal mostly with things whereas covenants deal with people. Contracts arrange the services of persons; covenants require their personal ownership and personal investment. Contracts exist for a specified time; covenants last forever. Contracts can be broken resulting in loss of revenue or property; covenants are not to be broken, but if they are, they cause heartbreaking wounds. Contracts are worldly affairs that belong to things secular; covenants are sacred affairs that belong in the home or the Church.

Contracts are best litigated by civil or canon lawyers; covenants are recognized by theologians, clergy, poets, and catechists. The state guarantees and witnesses the contract; God guarantees and witnesses the covenant. In some circumstances, children can enter into a contract; a covenant is not child's play but can only be entered into by conscious mentally, emotionally and spiritually mature adults (adapt. Paul Palmer, *Theological Studies*, 33 [1972]: 639).

#4.

Many years ago, my husband and I belonged to small Christian community. We called ourselves the Community of the Cross. We committed to join our lives to the cross of Christ, to participate in the paschal mystery to the best of our ability, with fervor and determination. We have tried to remain faithful to that core commitment throughout our 40 years of marriage. It has not been easy. It is one thing to commit to such a principle; it is quite another to live it. Sometimes we enjoyed amazing success, other times relative success, and other times we encountered nothing but abysmal failure. Since that time, our marriage has been tested in untold ways. Every relationship has one issue with which it struggles. We are no different. At times selfishness and arrogance held sway over compassion and consideration of the other person, and as a result, our recurring issue seemed overpowering.

There have been times when the person on the pillow next to us was less welcomed than a process server bearing dreaded eviction papers! However, the strength and sacrament of our marriage prevailed. The strength to endure, the strength to know that the life we have forged in tandem with Christ is a precious gift that must be safeguarded. The memories of so many years of deaths and resurrections, of nearly losing one of us



through a ruptured appendix, of enduring untold hardships due to the mental illness of a child, our daughter's heartbreaking loss of two babies to miscarriage, the untold joy of two weddings and three grandchildren, the abject horror over a child who escaped with her life and lost all she owned in the World Trade Center attacks, another child who told us of a brutal pain he endured as a child, the miraculous restoration of the mind and personality of our desperately mentally ill child and his slow road to a normal life after a dozen years in hell, the joy of reaching out as a family to the poor and oppressed in our area and watching our children share the same passion, the exhilaration of watching our children grow into adulthood and now, above all, feasting with our extended and growing family at the ongoing banquet of family life. The sacrament of our marriage, our commitment to fidelity and above all the love we have for one another has strengthened us to keep going, to die and rise for one another. We try to remember that there are three at the helm of our ship—Christ, my husband, and myself. With a partnership like that, nothing can prevail against us, in spite of the challenges of life. So long as we are willing to fight the good fight and above all to stay in the fight, we can be confident that we will never lose our mooring.



## Handout on Marriage

### Biblical Foundations of Marriage

#### Old Testament

- ▶ In the Old Testament, the patriarchal system considered women to be property of the husband. Thus, one must delve deeper to find God's intention for marriage in the Old Testament texts. One way to uncover a theology of marriage is to consider the marriage metaphors and images that were used to describe God's relationship with the people of Israel.
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treated as marginal members of society. The Torah did try to improve their status by freeing them to marry again so long as the husband provided a letter of divorce (Deut 24:1-4).

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5. Faithfulness of the partners toward one another

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- ▶ One amazingly liberating action taken by the Church was to require free consent of the partners. This effectively eliminated the practice of “bartering for” the spouse as if in a market-place transaction as was often the custom in clan and tribal cultures. Consent given under duress is considered invalid.

## Foundations Today

- The Second Vatican Council set out to renew and deepen the theology of marriage. The Council described marriage as a community of love, a sharing in life and love, a vocation (*Gaudium et Spes*, 47, 49).
- The Church insisted that God himself is the author of marriage. It is not a human institution. “The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature if man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator” (CCC, 1603).
- The Council returned to the concept of *covenant* (and all biblical meanings inherent in that word) to describe marriage.
- The sacrament provides a special strength or grace proper to the sacrament. Jesus Christ is the source of this grace. Jesus dwells in the couple and gives the grace and strength to carry the crosses of life, to follow Christ, to forgive one another, to bear one another's faults and burdens, and to love with a tender, fruitful, intimate love (CCC, 1642). (For a marriage to be valid, each person must have the ability to enter into such a covenant of love in the first place.)
- Church fathers maintained the importance of marriage in begetting children but understood the nature of married love finding fulfillment in those children.
- The Council stressed the importance of marital love and described the sacrament in terms of the love between husband and wife.
- Church fathers described the love of husband and wife and the effects of that love. They insisted that marital love is expressed and perfected in the marital act (GS 49).
- The teaching of the Council insisted that marital relations performed in accordance with human dignity must be honored with great reverence.
- The Church retained the language of contract but elevated the concept of covenant. Contract is used in a legalistic sense. It is used in relation to the exchange of vows and the legal relationship that flows from those vows (married



life). The free consent of both parties also falls under the contractual context of marriage. Thus, marriage is both a legal relationship (contract) as well as a religious relationship (covenant).

- Refer to Appendix #3 for a comparison of the word contract and covenant and the reason covenant is a better concept to describe marriage than is contract.

## Rite of marriage

- ▶ Acknowledging that our rituals express our theology, we hear the language of covenant expressed in the Nuptial Blessing in the Rite of Marriage. In that prayer, we are reminded that God, in order to reveal his plan of love for the world, made the union between husband and wife a reflection of the covenant he forged with his people.
- ▶ The blessing also reminds us that Christian marriage is a sign of the marriage between Jesus and the Church (cf. Nuptial Blessing, Rite of Marriage).
- ▶ The sacrament of marriage is a liturgical act—that means it is a public act. As such, it is appropriate that it take place in the public liturgy of the Church. The following elements are included in the rite of marriage.

### Question:

- ▶ The priest asks about each person's freedom of choice, about their faithfulness to each other, and their willingness to raise children.

### Consent

- ▶ The priest invites the couple to declare their consent.
- ▶ The couple joins hands.
  - The joining of hands is a sign of the unbreakable bond of marriage and the commitment to be faithful to one another.
- ▶ The bridegroom takes the woman to be his wife, and the bride takes the man to be her husband.
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that it is in this consent that the spouses are bound together as one flesh. So important is this free consent that if it is in any way coerced, or not freely entered into, then the marriage is invalid (CCC, 1628).
- ▶ The priest receives their consent and declares that what God has joined together no one shall divide.
- ▶ The priest or deacon receives the consent of the spouses on behalf of the Church and gives the Church's blessing (1628).

### Blessing of rings

- ▶ The priest blesses the rings that the bride and groom give to each other as a sign of their fidelity.

### Exchange of rings

- ▶ The couple exchange rings and declare them a sign of their fidelity to one another.

### Nuptial blessing

- ▶ The priest blesses the couple on behalf of the Church.



## **Symbols of Marriage**

- ▶ The primary symbols of marriage are the joining of hands and the conferral of rings. The love and permanence of the union is expressed in those symbols.

## **Canon Law and Marriage**

- ▶ Canon law is the official book of law for the Catholic Church that sets forth legislation on all matters pertaining to the Church.
- ▶ Canon law affirms that marriage is directed to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of offspring (1055).
- ▶ Canon law upholds the life-long bond as an essential characteristic of a valid marriage (1056).
- ▶ Canon law affirms marriage as a contract, a covenant, and a sacrament of the Church.
- ▶ Canon law asserts that marriage is a sign of the covenant God forged with humanity and Christ established with his Church.
- ▶ Canon law insists that the sacrament of marriage provides the spouses with a special strength and grace and a consecration so that they may effectively fulfill the dignity and obligations of the married state (1134).
- ▶ Canon law affirms that the regular form for marriage requires the legal act of requesting and requiring the free consent of the couple (1108 #2).

## **Conditions for a Valid Marriage**

- ▶ A marriage is valid only if each person is fully competent to enter into the marriage and both partners possess an absolute free will and desire to marry one another.
- ▶ A marriage is valid if consent is given before the bishop of the diocese or the pastor of the parish (or another priest, deacon, or designated lay person).
- ▶ A marriage is valid when two witnesses to the consent are present (1108 #1).
  - Witnesses are required because marriage is considered a state of life in the Church—just as priesthood is a state of life in the Church, thus there must be certainty that the marriage took place. Hence, two witnesses are required to testify to it. (CCC, 1631)
  - A marriage is absolutely indissoluble (unbreakable) if in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The marriage is deemed valid by the Church, if the marriage is consummated and if both partners are baptized.
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## **Annulments**

- ▶ The Church's teaching regarding marriage validity between baptized and non-baptized persons is complex and requires the ministry and assistance of the Church.
- ▶ In order for a person to be fully initiated in the Catholic Church, there must be no marriage impediments. In other words, if the person is in an irregular marriage, the impediments must be officially removed before the person is free to enter the Church.



- ▶ A person seeking entrance to the Church or access to the sacraments must be free to do so.
- ▶ A person is in an irregular marriage if that person or his or her spouse was married before, and subsequently divorced.
- ▶ If such is the case, an annulment of the first marriage is required before the person is free to have their present marriage blessed or enter the Church or have access to the sacraments.
- ▶ The annulment process has the potential to bring healing and closure to the wounds caused by divorce. The Church always seeks to err on the side of compassion and will do everything in its power to assist people in removing the impediments that would keep them from the sacraments of the Church. It is important that such persons meet with their pastor to discuss all of his or her options.